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ART. I.—*A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada.* By Fray Antonio Agapida. 1829. 2 vols. 12mo. Philadelphia. Carey, Lea, & Carey.

ALMOST as many qualifications may be demanded for a perfect historian, indeed the Abbé Mably has enumerated as many, as Cicero stipulates for a perfect orator. He must be strictly impartial; a lover of truth under all circumstances, and ready to declare it at all hazards; he must be deeply conversant with whatever may bring into relief the character of the people he is depicting,—not merely with their laws, constitution, general resources, and all the other more visible parts of the machinery of government, but with the nicer moral and social relations, the informing spirit, which gives life to the whole, but escapes the eye of a vulgar observer. If he has to do with other ages and nations, he must transport himself into them, expatriating himself, as it were, from his own, in order to get the very form and pressure of the times he is delineating. He must be conscientious in his attention to geography, chronology, &c., an inaccuracy in which has been fatal to more than one good philosophical history; and mixed up with all these drier details, he must display the various powers of a novelist or dramatist, throwing his characters into suitable lights and shades, disposing his scenes so as to awaken and maintain an unflagging interest, and diffusing over the whole that finished style, without which his work will only become a magazine of materials for the more

elegant edifices of subsequent writers. He must be—in short, there is no end to what a perfect historian must be and do. It is hardly necessary to add, that such a monster never did and never will exist.

But, although we cannot attain to perfect excellence in this, or any other science in this world, considerable approaches have been made to it, and different individuals have arisen at different periods, possessed, in an eminent degree, of some of the principal qualities, which go to make up the aggregate of the character we have been describing. The peculiar character of these qualities will generally be determined in the writer, by that of the age in which he lives. Thus the earlier historians of Greece and Rome sought less to instruct than to amuse. They filled their pictures with dazzling and seductive images. In their researches into antiquity, they were not startled by the marvellous, like the more prudish critics of our day, but welcomed it as likely to stir the imaginations of their readers. They seldom interrupted the story by impertinent reflection. They bestowed infinite pains on the costume, the style of their history, and, in fine, made everything subordinate to the main purpose of conveying an elegant and interesting *narrative*. Such was Herodotus, such Livy, and such too, the earlier Chroniclers of modern Europe, whose pages glow with the picturesque and brilliant pageants of an age of chivalry. These last, as well as Herodotus, may be said to have written in the infancy of their nations, when the imagination is more willingly addressed than the understanding. Livy, who wrote in a riper age, lived nevertheless in a court and a period, where tranquillity and opulence disposed the minds of men to elegant recreation, rather than to severe discipline and exertion.

As, however, the nation advanced in years, or became oppressed with calamity, history also assumed a graver complexion. Fancy gave way to reflection. The mind, no longer invited to rove abroad in quest of elegant and alluring pictures, was driven back upon itself, speculated more deeply, and sought for support under the external evils of life, in moral and philosophical truth. Description was abandoned for the study of character ; men took the place of events ; and the romance was converted into a drama. Thus it was with Tacitus, who lived under those imperial monsters, who turned Rome into a charnel-house ; and his compact narratives are filled with

moral and political axioms sufficiently numerous to make a volume ; and, indeed, Brotier has made one of them in his edition of the historian. The same philosophical spirit animates the page of Thucydides, himself one of the principal actors in the long, disastrous struggle, that terminated in the ruin of his nation.

But, notwithstanding the deeper and more comprehensive thought of these later writers, there was still a wide difference between the complexion given to history under their hands, and that which it has assumed in our time. We would not be understood as determining, but simply as discriminating their relative merits. The Greeks and Romans lived when the world, at least when the mind, was in its comparative infancy ; when fancy and feeling were most easily, and loved most to be excited. They possessed a finer sense of beauty than the moderns. They were infinitely more solicitous about the external dress, the finish, and all that makes up the poetry of a composition. Poetry, indeed, mingled in their daily pursuits, as well as pleasures ; it determined their gravest deliberations. The command of their armies was given, not to the best general, but oft-times to the most eloquent orator. Poetry entered into their religion, and created those beautiful monuments of architecture and sculpture, which the breath of time has not tarnished. It entered into their philosophy,—and no one confessed its influence more deeply, than he who would have banished it from his Republic. It informed the souls of their orators, and prompted those magnificent rhapsodies, which fall lifeless enough from the stammering tongue of the schoolboy, but which once ‘awak’d to extacy the living’ populace of Athens. It entered deeply even into their latest history. It was first exhibited in the national chronicles of Homer. It lost little of its coloring, though it conformed to the general laws of prosaic composition, under Herodotus. And it shed a pleasing grace over the sober pages of Thucydides and Xenophon. The Muse, indeed, was stript of her wings. She no longer made her airy excursions into the fairy regions of romance. But as she moved along the earth, the sweetest wild-flowers seemed to spring up unbidden at her feet. We would not be understood as implying that Grecian history was ambitious of florid or meretricious ornament. Nothing, indeed, could be more simple than its general plan and execution ; far too simple, we fear, for imitation in our day. Thus Thucydides,

for example, distributes his events most inartificially, according to the regular revolutions of the seasons ; and the rear of every section is brought up with the same eternal repetition of *ἔτος τῷ πολέμῳ ἐτέλευτα τῷδε, ὃν Θουκυδίδης ἔννέγγαψε.* But in the fictitious speeches, with which he has illuminated his narrative, he has left the choicest specimens of Attic eloquence ; and he elaborated his general diction into so high a finish that Demosthenes, as is well known, in the hope of catching some of his rhetorical graces, thought him worthy of being thrice transcribed with his own hand.

Far different has been the general conception, as well as execution, of history by the moderns. In this, however, it was accommodated to the exigencies of their situation, and, as with the ancients, still reflected the spirit of the age. If the Greeks lived in the infancy of civilization, the contemporaries of our day may be said to have reached its prime. The same revolution has taken place as in the growth of an individual. The vivacity of the imagination has been blunted, but reason is matured. The credulity of youth has given way to habits of cautious inquiry, and sometimes to a phlegmatic scepticism. The productions, indeed, which first appeared in the doubtful twilight of morning, exhibited the love of the marvellous, the light and fanciful spirit of a green and tender age. But a new order of things commenced, as the stores of classical learning were unrolled to the eye of the scholar. The mind seemed at once to enter upon the rich inheritance, which the sages of antiquity had been ages in accumulating, and to start, as it were, from the very point where they had terminated their career. Thus raised by learning and experience, it was enabled to take a wider view of its proper destiny ; to understand that truth is the greatest good, and to discern the surest method of arriving at it. The Christian doctrine, too, inculcated that the end of being was best answered by a life of active usefulness, and not by one of abstract contemplation, or selfish indulgence, or passive fortitude, as variously taught by the various sects of antiquity. Hence a new standard of moral excellence was formed. Pursuits were estimated by their practical results ; and the useful was preferred to the ornamental. Poetry, confined to her own sphere, was no longer permitted to mingle in the counsels of philosophy. Intellectual and physical science, instead of floating on vague speculation as with the ancients, was established on careful induction and experiment. The orator,

instead of adorning himself with the ‘pomp and garniture’ of verse, sought only to acquire greater dexterity in the management of the true weapons of debate. The passions were less frequently assailed, the reason more. A wider field was opened to the historian. He was no longer to concoct his narrative, if the scene lay in a remote period, from the superficial rumors of oral tradition. Libraries were to be ransacked ; medals and monuments to be studied ; obsolete manuscripts to be decyphered. Every assertion was to be fortified by an authority. And the opinions of others, instead of being admitted on easy faith, were to be carefully collated, and the balance of probability struck between them. With these qualifications of antiquarian and critic the modern historian was to combine that of the philosopher ; deducing from his mass of facts general theorems, and giving to them their most extended application.

By all this process poetry lost much, but philosophy gained more. The elegant arts sensibly declined ; but the most important and recondite secrets of nature were laid open. All those sciences, which have for their object the happiness and improvement of the species, the science of government, of political economy, of education,—natural and experimental science were carried far beyond the boundaries, which they could possibly have reached under the ancient systems.

The peculiar forms of historic writing, as it exists with the moderns, were not fully developed until the last century. It may be well enough to notice the intermediate shape which it assumed, before it reached this period, in Spain and Italy, but especially this latter country, in the sixteenth century. The Italian historians of that age seemed to have combined the generalizing and reflecting spirit characteristic of the moderns, with the simple and graceful forms of composition, which have descended to us from the ancients. Machiavelli, in particular, may remind us of some recent statue, which exhibits all the lineaments and proportions of a contemporary, but to which the sculptor has given a sort of antique dignity by enveloping it in the folds of the Roman toga. No one of the Spanish historians is to be named with him. Mariana, who enjoys among them the greatest celebrity, has, indeed, given to his style, both in the Latin and Castilian, the elegant transparency of an ancient classic, but the mass of detail is not quickened by a single spark of philosophy or original reflection. Maria-

na was a monk ; one of a community, who have formed the most copious, but in many respects the most incompetent chroniclers in the world ; cut off, as they are, from all sympathy with any portion of the species, save their own order,—and predisposed by education to admit as truth the grossest forgeries of fanaticism. What can their narratives be worth, distorted thus by prejudice and credulity ? The Aragonese writers, and Zurita, in particular, though far inferior as to the literary execution of their works, exhibit a pregnant thought and a manly independence of expression far superior to the Jesuit Mariana.

The Italian historians of the sixteenth century, moreover, had the good fortune not only to have been eye-witnesses, but to have played prominent parts in the events which they commemorated. And this gives a vitality to their touches, which is in vain to be expected from those of a closet politician. This rare union of public and private excellence is delicately intimated in the inscription on Guicciardini's monument, ‘ *Cujus negotium, an otium, glriosius incertum.* ’

The personage, by whom the present laws of historic composition may be said to have been first arranged into a regular system, was Voltaire. This extraordinary genius, whose works have been productive of so much mingled good and evil, discovers in them many traces of a humane and beneficent disposition. Nowhere is his invective more keenly directed, than against acts of cruelty and oppression, above all, of religious oppression. He lived in an age of crying abuses both in church and government. Unfortunately he employed a weapon against them, whose influence is not to be controlled by the most expert hand. The envenomed shaft of irony, not only wounds the member at which it is aimed, but diffuses its poison to the healthiest and remotest regions of the body.

The free and volatile temper of Voltaire forms a singular contrast with his resolute pertinacity of purpose. Bard, philosopher, historian, this literary Proteus animated every shape with the same mischievous spirit of philosophy. It never deserted him, even in the most sportive sallies of his fancy. It seasons his Romances, equally with his gravest pieces in the *Encyclopædia*,—his familiar letters and most licentious doggerel, no less than his Histories. The leading object of this philosophy may be defined by the single cant phrase, ‘ the abolition of prejudices.’ But in Voltaire, prejudices were too often confounded with principles.

In his Histories, he seems ever intent on exhibiting, in the most glaring colors, the manifold inconsistencies of the human race ; in showing the contradiction between profession and practice ; in contrasting the magnificence of the apparatus, with the impotence of the results. The enormous abuses of Christianity are brought into juxtaposition with the most meritorious features in other religions ; and thus all are reduced to nearly the same level. The credulity of one half of mankind is set in opposition to the cunning of the other. The most momentous events are traced to the most insignificant causes ; and the ripest schemes of wisdom are shown to have been baffled by the intervention of the most trivial accidents. Thus the conduct of the world seems to be regulated by chance ; the springs of human action are resolved into selfishness ; and religion, of whatever denomination, is only a different form of superstition. It is true that his satire is directed not so much against any particular system, as the vices of that system. But the result left upon the mind is not a whit less pernicious. His philosophical romance of 'Candide,' affords a good exemplification of his manner. The thesis of perfect optimism in this world, at which he levels this *jeu d'esprit*, is manifestly indefensible. But then he supports his position with such an array of gross and hyperbolical atrocities, without the intervention of a single palliative circumstance, and withal in such a tone of keen derision, that if any serious impression be left on the mind, it can be no other than that of a baleful, withering scepticism. The historian rarely so far forgets his philosophy as to kindle into high and generous emotion, the glow of patriotism, or moral and religious enthusiasm. And hence too, his style, though always graceful, and often seasoned with the sallies of a piquant wit, never rises into eloquence or sublimity.

Voltaire has been frequently reproached for want of historical accuracy. But if we make due allowance for the sweeping tenor of his reflections, and for the infinite variety of his topics, we shall be slow in giving credit to this charge.\* He was, indeed, oftentimes misled by his inveterate Pyrrhonism ; a defect, when carried to the excess in which he indulged it, al-

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\* Indeed Hallam and Warton, the one as diligent a laborer in the field of civil history, as the other has been in literary, both bear testimony to his general veracity.

most equally fatal to the historian, with credulity or superstition. His researches frequently led him into dark, untravelled regions; but the aliment, which he imported thence, served only, too often, to minister to his pernicious philosophy. He resembled the allegorical agents of Milton, paving a way across the gulf of Chaos, for the spirits of mischief to enter more easily upon the earth.

Voltaire effected a no less sensible revolution in the structure than in the spirit of history. Thus, instead of following the natural consecutive order of events, the work was distributed, on the principle of a *Catalogue raisonné*, into sections arranged according to their subjects, and copious dissertations were introduced into the body of the narrative. Thus, in his *Essai sur les Mœurs, &c.*, one chapter is devoted to letters, another to religion, a third to manners, and so on. And in the same way, in his 'Age of Louis the Fourteenth,' he has thrown his various illustrations of the policy of government, and of the social habits of the court, into a detached portion at the close of the book.

This, indeed, would seem to be deviating from the natural course of things, as they occur in the world; where the multifarious pursuits of pleasure and business, the lights and shadows, as it were, of life, are daily intermingled in the motley panorama of human existence. But, however artificial this division, it enabled the reader to arrive more expeditiously at the results, for which alone history is valuable, while, at the same time, it put it in the power of the writer to convey with more certainty and facility his own impressions.

This system was subsequently so much refined upon, that Montesquieu, in his 'Grandeur et Décadence des Romains,' laid no further stress on historical facts, than as they furnished him with illustrations of his particular theorems. Indeed, so little did his work rest upon the veracity of such facts, that although the industry of Niebuhr, or rather of Beaufort, has knocked away almost all the foundations of early Rome, Montesquieu's treatise remains as essentially unimpaired in credit as before. Thus the materials, which anciently formed the body of history, now served only as ingredients from which its spirit was to be extracted. But this was not always the spirit of truth. And the arbitrary selection, as well as disposition of incidents, which this new method allowed, and the coloring which they were to receive from the author, made it easy to pervert them to the construction of the wildest hypotheses.

The progress of philosophical history is particularly observable in Great Britain, where it seems to have been admirably suited to the grave, reflecting temper of the people. In the graces of *narrative*, they have ever been unequal to their French neighbors. Their ancient Chronicles are inferior in spirit and execution, to those either of France or Spain. And their more elaborate histories, down to the middle of the eighteenth century, could not in any way compete with the illustrious models of Italy. But soon after this period, several writers appeared, exhibiting a combination of qualities, erudition, critical penetration, powers of generalization, and a political sagacity, unrivalled in any other age or country.

The influence of the new forms of historical composition, however, was here, as elsewhere, made too frequently subservient to party and sectarian prejudices. Tory histories, and Whig histories, Protestant and Catholic histories successively appeared, and seemed to neutralize each other. The most venerable traditions were exploded, as nursery tales. The statues decreed by antiquity were cast down; and the characters of miscreants, whom the general suffrage of mankind had damned to infamy, of a Dionysius, a Borgia, or a Richard the Third, were now retraced by what Jovius distinguishes as 'the golden pen' of the historian, until the reader, bewildered in the maze of uncertainty, is almost ready to join in the exclamation of Lord Orford to his son, 'Oh quote me not history, for that I know to be false!' It is remarkable, indeed, that the last mentioned monarch, Richard the Third, whose name has become a by-word of atrocity, the burden of the ballad, and the moral of the drama, should have been the subject of elaborate vindication by two eminent writers of the most opposite characters,—the pragmatical Horace Walpole, and the circumspect and conscientious Sharon Turner. The apology of the latter exhibits a technical precision, a severe scrutiny into the authenticity of records, and a nice balancing of contradictory testimony, that give it all the air of a legal investigation. Thus history seems to be conducted on the principles of a judicial process, in which the writer, assuming the functions of an advocate, studiously suppresses whatever may make against his own side, supports himself by the strongest array of evidence which he can muster, discredits, as far as possible, that of the opposite party, and by dexterous interpre-

tation and ingenious inference, makes out the most plausible argument for his client that the case will admit.

But these, after all, are only the abuses of philosophical history ; and the unseasonable length of remark, into which we have been unwarily led in respect to them, may give us the appearance of laying on them greater emphasis than they actually deserve. There are few writers in any country, whose judgment has not been sometimes warped by personal prejudices. But it is to the credit of the principal British historians, that however they may have been occasionally under the influence of such human infirmity, they have conducted their researches, in the main, with equal integrity and impartiality. And while they have enriched their writings with the stores of a various erudition, they have digested from these details, results of the most enlarged and practical application. Thus history in their hands, although it may have lost much of the simplicity and graphic vivacity, which it maintained with the ancients, has gained much more in the amount of useful knowledge, and the lessons of sound philosophy, which it inculcates.

There is no writer, who in his productions exhibits more distinctly the full developement of the principles of modern history, with all its virtues and defects, than Gibbon. His learning was fully equal to his vast subject. This, commencing with expiring civilization in ancient Rome, continues on until the period of its final and perfect resurrection in Italy, in the fifteenth century ; and thus may be said to furnish the lights which are to guide us through the long interval of darkness, which divides the old from the modern world. The range of his subject was fully equal to its duration. Goths, Huns, Tartars, and all the rude tribes of the north, are brought upon the stage, along with the more cultivated natives of the south, the Greeks, Italians, and the intellectual Arab ; and as the scene shifts from one country to another, we behold its population depicted with that peculiarity of physiognomy, and studied propriety of costume, which belong to dramatic exhibition. For Gibbon was a more vivacious draughtsman, than most writers of his school. He was moreover deeply versed in geography, chronology, the study of antiquities, verbal criticism, in short, in all the sciences in any way subsidiary to his art. The extent of his subject permitted him to indulge in those elaborate disquisitions, so congenial to the spirit of modern history, on the most momen-

tous and interesting topics. While his early studies enabled him to embellish the drier details of his narrative, with the charms of a liberal and elegant scholarship.

What then was wanting to this accomplished writer? Good faith. His defects were precisely of the class, of which we have before been speaking, and his most elaborate efforts exhibit too often the perversion of learning and ingenuity to the vindication of preconceived hypotheses. He cannot, indeed, be convicted of ignorance, or literal inaccuracy, as he has triumphantly proved in his discomfiture of the unfortunate Davis. But his disingenuous mode of conducting the argument, leads precisely to the same unfair result. Thus, in his celebrated chapters on the 'Progress of Christianity,' which he tells us were 'reduced by three successive revisals, from a bulky volume to their present size,' he has often slurred over in the text such particulars as might reflect most credit on the character of the religion, or shuffled them into a note at the bottom of the page; while all that admits of a doubtful complexion in its early propagation, is ostentatiously blazoned, and set in opposition with the most amiable features of Paganism. While by a style of innuendo, that conveys 'more than meets the ear,' he has contrived, with Iago-like duplicity, to breathe a taint of suspicion on the purity, which he dares not openly assail. It would be easy to furnish examples of all this, were this the place for it. But the charges have no novelty, and have been abundantly substantiated by others.

It is a consequence of this scepticism in Gibbon, as with Voltaire, that his writings are nowhere warmed with a generous moral sentiment. The most sublime of all spectacles, that of the martyr, who suffers for conscience' sake, and this equally whether his creed be founded in truth or error, is contemplated by the historian with the smile, or rather sneer, of philosophic indifference. This is not only bad taste, as he is addressing a Christian audience, but he thus voluntarily relinquishes one of the most powerful engines for the movement of human passion; which is never so easily excited as by deeds of suffering, self-devoted heroism.

But although Gibbon was wholly defective in moral enthusiasm, his style is vivified by a certain exhilarating glow, that kindles a corresponding warmth in the bosom of his reader. This may, perhaps, be traced to his egotism, or, to speak more liberally to an ardent attachment to his professional pursuits,

—and to his inextinguishable love of letters. This enthusiasm appears in almost every page of his great work, and enabled him to triumph over all its difficulties. It is particularly conspicuous whenever he touches upon Rome, the Alma Mater of science, and whose adopted son he may be said to have been from his earliest boyhood. Whenever he contemplates her fallen fortunes, he mourns over her with the fond solicitude that might become an ancient Roman. And when he depicts her pristine glories, dimly seen by us through the mist of so many centuries, he does it with such vivid accuracy of conception, that the reader, like the traveller who wanders through the excavations of Pompeii, seems to be gazing on the original forms and brilliant colors of antiquity.

To Gibbon's egotism,—in its most literal sense,—to his personal vanity may be traced some of the peculiar defects for which his style is conspicuous. The 'Historian of the Decline and Fall,' too rarely forgets his own importance in that of his subject. The consequence, which he attaches to his personal labors, is shown in a bloated dignity of expression, and an ostentation of ornament, that contrast whimsically enough with the trifling topics and commonplace thoughts, on which, in the course of his long work, they are occasionally employed. He nowhere moves along with the easy freedom of nature, but seems to leap, as it were, from triad to triad, by a succession of strained, convulsive efforts. He affected, as he tells us, the light festive raillery of Voltaire. But his cumbrous imitation of the mercurial Frenchman may remind one, to make use of a homely simile, of the ass in *Æsop's* fable, who frisked upon his master in imitation of the sportive gambols of the spaniel. The two first octavo volumes of Gibbon's History were written in a comparatively modest and unaffected manner, for he was then uncertain of the public favor. And, indeed, his style was exceedingly commended by the most competent critics of that day, as Hume, Joseph Warton, and others, as is abundantly shown in their correspondence. But when he had tasted the sweets of popular applause, and had been crowned as the historian of the day, his increased consequence becomes at once visible in the assumed stateliness and magnificence of his bearing. But even after this period, whenever the subject is suited to this style, and when his phlegmatic temper is warmed by those generous emotions, of which, as we have said, it was sometimes susceptible, he exhibits his ideas in the most splendid and imposing forms, of which the English language is capable.

The most eminent illustrations of the system of historical writing, which we have been discussing, that have appeared in England, in the present century, are the works of Mr Hallam ; in which the author, discarding most of the circumstances that go to make up mere narrative, endeavors to fix the attention of the reader on the more important features of constitutional polity, employing his wide range of materials in strict subordination to this purpose.

But while history has thus been conducted on nearly the same principles in England for the last century, a new path has been struck out in France, or rather an attempt has lately been made there to retrace the old one. M. Barante, still better known as an elegant literary critic, than as an historian, in the preliminary remarks to his 'Histoire des Ducs de Bourgogne,' considers the draughts of modern compilers as altogether wanting in the vivacity and freshness of their originals. They tell the reader how he should feel, instead of making him do so. They give him their own results, instead of enabling him by a fair delineation of incidents to form his own. And while the early chroniclers, in spite of their unformed and obsolete idiom, are still read with delight, the narratives of the former are too often dry, languid, and uninteresting. He proposes, therefore, by a close adhesion to his originals, to extract, as it were, the spirit of their works, without any affectation, however, of their antiquated phraseology ; and to exhibit as vivid and veracious a portraiture, as possible, of the times he is delineating, unbroken by any discussions or reflections of his own. The result has been a work in eleven octavo volumes, which, notwithstanding its bulk, has already passed into four editions.

The two last productions of our countryman, Mr Irving, undoubtedly fall within the class of narrative history. To this, indeed, he seems peculiarly suited by his genius, his fine perception of moral and natural beauty, his power of discriminating the most delicate shades of character, and of unfolding a series of events, so as to maintain a lively interest in the reader ; and a *lactea ubertas* of expression which can impart a living eloquence even to the most commonplace sentiments. Had the 'Life of Columbus' been written by an historian of the other school of which we have been speaking, he would have enlarged with greater circumstantiality on the system adopted by Ferdinand and Isabella for the administration of their colonies, and for the regulation of trade ; nor would he have neglected to

descant on a topic, worn somewhat threadbare it must be owned, so momentous as the moral and political consequences of the discovery of America ; neither would such a writer, in an account of the conquest of Granada, have omitted to collect such particulars as might throw light on the genius, social institutions, and civil polity of the Spanish Arabs. But all these particulars, however pertinent to a philosophical history, would have been entirely out of keeping in Mr Irving's, and might have produced a disagreeable discordance in the general harmony of his plan.

Mr Irving has seldom selected a subject better suited to his peculiar powers, than the conquest of Granada. Indeed, it would hardly have been possible for one of his warm sensibilities to have lingered so long among the remains of Moorish magnificence, with which Spain is covered, without being interested in the fortunes of a people, whose memory has almost passed into oblivion, but who once preserved the 'sacred flame,' when it had become extinct in every corner of Christendom, and whose influence is still visible on the intellectual culture of Modern Europe. It has been found no easy matter, however, to compile a satisfactory and authenticated account of the Arabians, notwithstanding that the number of their historians, cited by D'Herbelot and Casiri, would appear to exceed that of any European nation. The despotic governments of the East have never been found propitious to that independence of opinion so essential to historical composition ; 'ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere licet.' And their copious compilations, prolific in frivolous and barren detail, are too often wholly destitute of the sap and vitality of history.

The social and moral institutions of Arabian Spain experienced a considerable modification from her long intercourse with the Europeans ; and she offers a nobler field of research for the chronicler, than is to be found in any other country of the Moslem. Notwithstanding this, the Castilian scholars, until within late years, have done little towards elucidating the national antiquities of their Saracen brethren ; and our most copious notices of their political history, until the late posthumous publication of Conde, have been drawn from the extracts which M. Cardonne translated from the Arabic Manuscripts in the Royal Library at Paris.

The most interesting periods of the Saracen dominion in Spain, are that embraced by the Empire of the Oneyades of

Cordova, between the years 755 and 1030,—and that of the Kingdom of Granada, extending from the middle of the thirteenth to the close of the fifteenth century. The intervening period of their existence in the Peninsula offers only a spectacle of inextricable anarchy. The first of these periods was that in which the Arabs attained their meridian of opulence and power, and in which their general illumination affords a striking contrast with the deep barbarism of the rest of Europe. But it was that, too, in which their character, having been but little affected by contact with the Spaniards, retained most of its original Asiatic peculiarities. This has never been regarded, therefore, by European scholars, as a period of greatest interest in their history, nor has it ever, so far as we are aware, been selected for the purposes of romantic fiction. But when their territories became reduced within the limits of Granada, the Moors had insensibly submitted to the superior influences of their Christian neighbors. Their story, at this time, abounds in passages of uncommon beauty and interest. Their wars were marked by feats of personal prowess and romantic adventure, while the intervals of peace were abandoned to all the license of luxurious revelry. Their character, therefore, blending the various peculiarities of Oriental and European civilization, offers a rich study for the poet and the novelist. As such, it has been liberally employed by the Spaniards, and has not been altogether neglected by the writers of other nations. Thus Florian, whose sentiments, as well as his style, seem to be always floundering midway betwixt the regions of prose and poetry, has made out of the story of this people his popular romance of 'Gonsalvo of Cordova.' We have also met with a commendatory notice of an Italian Epic in Tiraboschi, entitled 'Il Conquista di Granata,' though we have never seen the original. The ground, however, before the appearance of Mr Irving, had not been occupied by any writer of eminence, in the English language, for the purposes either of romance or history.

The conquest of Granada, to which Mr Irving has confined himself, so disastrous to the Moors, was one of the most brilliant achievements in the most brilliant period of Spanish history. Nothing is more usual than overweening commendations of antiquity; the 'good old times,' whose harsher features, like those of a rugged landscape, lose all their asperity in the distance. But the period of which we are speaking, embracing the reigns of Ferdinand and Isabella at the close of the fifteenth and begin-

ning of the sixteenth centuries, was undoubtedly that, in which the Spanish nation displayed the fulness of its moral and physical energies, when, escaping from the license of a youthful age, it seems to have reached the full prime of manhood, and the perfect developement of those faculties, whose overstrained exertions were soon to be followed by exhaustion and premature decrepitude.

The remnant of Spaniards, who, retreating to the mountains of the north, escaped the overwhelming inundation of the Saracens at the beginning of the eighth century, continued to cherish the free institutions of their Gothic ancestors. The 'Fuero Juzgo,' the ancient Visi-Gothic code, was still retained by the people of Castile and Leon, and may be said, indeed, to form the basis of all their subsequent legislation. While in Aragon the dissolution of the primitive monarchy opened the way for even more liberal and equitable forms of government. The independence of character, thus fostered by the peculiar constitutions of these petty states, was still further promoted by the circumstances of their situation. Their uninterrupted wars with the infidel,—the necessity of winning back from him inch by inch, as it were, the conquered soil, required the active coöperation of every class of the community, and gave to the mass of the people an intrepidity, a personal consequence, and an extent of immunities, such as were not enjoyed by them in any other country of Europe. The free cities acquired considerable tracts of the reconquered territory with rights of jurisdiction over them, and sent their representatives to Cortes, near a century before a similar privilege was conceded to them in England. Even the peasantry, so degraded, at this period, throughout the rest of Europe, assumed under this state of things a conscious dignity and importance, which are visible in their manners at this day ;—and it was in this class during the late French invasions, that the fire of ancient patriotism revived with greatest force, when it seemed almost extinct in the breasts of the degenerate nobles.

The religious feeling, which mingled in their wars with the infidels, gave to their character a tinge of lofty enthusiasm. And the irregular nature of this warfare suggested abundant topics for that popular minstrelsy, which acts so powerfully on the passions of a people. The 'Poem of the Cid,' which appeared, according to Sanchez, before the middle of the twelfth century, contributed in no slight degree, by calling up the most inspiring

national recollections, to keep alive the generous glow of patriotism. This influence is not imaginary. Heeren pronounces the ‘poems of Homer to have been the principal bond which united the Grecian States.’ And every one knows the influence exercised over the Scottish peasantry by the Border minstrelsy. Many anecdotes might be quoted to show the veneration universally entertained by the Spaniards, broken, as they were, into as many discordant states as ever swarmed over Greece, for their favorite hero of romance and history. Among others, Mariana relates one of a king of Navarre, who, making an incursion into Castile about a century after the warrior’s death, was carrying off a rich booty, when he was met by an Abbot of a neighboring convent, with his monks, bearing aloft the standard of the Cid, who implored him to restore the plunder to the inhabitants from whom he had ravished it. And the monarch, moved by the sight of the sacred relic, after complying with his request, escorted back the banner in solemn procession with his whole army to the place of its deposit.

But while all these circumstances conspired to give an uncommon elevation to the character of the ancient Spaniard, even of the humblest rank, and while the prerogative of the monarch was more precisely as well as narrowly defined, than in most of the other nations of Christendom, the aristocracy of the country was insensibly extending its privileges, and laying the foundation of a power that eventually overshadowed the throne and well nigh subverted the liberties of the state. In addition to the usual enormous immunities claimed by this order in feudal governments (although there is no reason to believe that the system of feudal tenure obtained in Castile, as it certainly did in Aragon), they enjoyed a constitutional privilege of withdrawing their allegiance from their sovereign on sending him a formal notice of such renunciation, and the sovereign, on his part, was obliged to provide for the security of their estates and families, as long as they might choose to continue in such overt rebellion. These anarchical provisions in their constitution did not remain a dead letter, and repeated examples of their pernicious application are enumerated both by the historians of Aragon and Castile. The long minorities, with which the latter country was afflicted, moreover, contributed still further to swell the overgrown power of the privileged orders; and the violent revolution, which, in 1368, placed the house of Trastamarre upon the throne, by impairing the revenues, and consequently

the authority of the crown, opened the way for the wild uproar, which reigned throughout the kingdom during the succeeding century. Alonso de Palencia, a contemporary chronicler, dwells with melancholy minuteness on the calamities of this unhappy period; when the whole country was split into factions of the nobles, the monarch openly contemned, the commons trodden in the dust, the court become a brothel, the treasury bankrupt, public faith a jest, and private morals too loose and audacious to court even the veil of hypocrisy.

The wise administration of Ferdinand and Isabella could alone have saved the state in this hour of peril. It effected, indeed, a change on the face of things as magical as that produced by the wand of an enchanter in some Eastern tale. Their reign it is true, wears a more glorious aspect from its contrast with the turbulent period which preceded it, as the landscape glows with redoubled brilliancy when the sunshine has scattered the tempest. We shall briefly notice some of the features of the policy, by which they effected this change.

They obtained from the Cortes an act for the resumption of the improvident grants made by their predecessor. By which means an immense accession of revenue, which had been squandered upon unworthy favorites, was brought back to the royal treasury. They compelled many of the nobility to resign, in favor of the crown, such of its possessions, as they had acquired by force, fraud, or intrigue, during the late season of anarchy. The son of that gallant Marquis Duke of Cadiz, for instance, with whom the reader has become so familiar in Mr Irving's Chronicle, was stripped of his patrimony of Cadiz, and compelled to exchange it for the humbler territory of Arcos, from which the family henceforth derived their title. By all these expedients the revenues of the state, at the demise of Isabella, were increased twelve fold beyond what they had been at the time of her accession. They reorganized the ancient institution of the 'Hermandad,'—a very different association under their hands from the 'Holy Brotherhood,' which we meet with in *Gil Blas*. Every hundred householders were obliged to equip and maintain a horseman at their joint expense; and this corps furnished a vigilant police in civil emergencies, and an effectual aid in time of war. It was found, moreover, of especial service in suppressing the insurrections and disorders of the nobility. They were particularly solicitous to abolish the right and usage of private war, claimed by this haughty order, com-

PELLING them, on all occasions, to refer their disputes to the constituted tribunals of justice. But it was a capital feature in the policy of the Catholic sovereigns to counterbalance the authority of the aristocracy, by exalting, as far as prudent, that of the commons. In the various convocations of the national legislature, or Cortes, in this reign, no instance occurs of any city having lost its prescriptive right of furnishing representatives, as had frequently happened under preceding monarchs, who, from negligence or policy, had omitted to summon them.

But it would be tedious to go into all the details of the system, employed by Ferdinand and Isabella, for the regeneration of the decayed fabric of government ;—of their wholesome regulations for the encouragement of industry ; of their organisation of a national militia, and an efficient marine ; of the severe decorum, which they introduced within the corrupt precincts of the court ; of the temperate economy, by which they controlled the public expenditures ; and of the munificent patronage, which they, or rather their almoner on this occasion, that most enlightened of bigots, Cardinal Ximenes, dispensed to science and letters. In short, their sagacious provisions were not merely remedial of former abuses, but were intended to call forth all the latent energies of the Spanish character, and with these excellent materials, to erect a constitution of government which should secure to the nation tranquillity at home, and enable it to go forward in its ambitious career of discovery and conquest.

The results were certainly equal to the wisdom of the preparations. The first of the series of brilliant enterprises was the conquest of the Moorish kingdom of Granada ;—those rich and lovely regions of the Peninsula, the last retreat of the infidel, and of which he had continued in possession for nearly eight centuries. This together with the subsequent occupation of Navarre by the crafty Ferdinand, consolidated the various principalities of Spain into one monarchy, and, by extending its boundaries in the Peninsula to their present dimensions, raised it from a subordinate situation to the first class of European powers. The Italian wars, under the conduct of the ‘ Great Captain,’ secured to Spain the more specious, but less useful acquisition of Naples ; and formed that invincible infantry, which enabled Charles the Fifth to dictate laws to Europe for nearly half a century. And, lastly, as if the old world could not afford a theatre sufficiently vast for their ambition, Columbus gave a new world to Castile and Leon.

Such was the attitude assumed by the nation under the Catholic Kings, as they were called ; it was the season of hope and youthful enterprise, when the nation seemed to be renewing its ancient energies, and to prepare like a giant to run its course. The modern Spaniard, who casts his eye over the long interval that has since elapsed, during the first half of which, the nation seemed to waste itself on schemes of mad ambition, or fierce fanaticism, and in the latter half to sink into a state of paralytic torpor,—the Spaniard, we say, who casts a melancholy glance over this dreary interval, will turn with satisfaction to the close of the sixteenth century, as the most glorious epoch in the annals of his country. This is the period, to which Mr Irving has introduced us in his late work. And if his portraiture of the Castilian of that day wears somewhat of a romantic and, indeed, incredible aspect to those who contrast it with the present, they must remember that he is only reviving the tints which had faded on the canvass of history. But it is time that we should return from this long digression, into which we have been led by the desire of exhibiting in stronger relief some peculiarities in the situation and spirit of the nation, at the period from which Mr Irving has selected the materials of his last, indeed, his two last publications.

Our author, in his ‘Chronicle of Granada,’ has been but slightly indebted to Arabic authorities. Neither Conde nor Cardonne has expended more than fifty or sixty pages on this humiliating topic. But ample amends have been offered in the copious prolixity of the Castilian writers. The Spaniards can boast a succession of Chronicles from the period of the great Saracen invasion. Those of a more early date, compiled in rude Latin, are sufficiently meagre and unsatisfactory. But from the middle of the thirteenth century, the stream of history runs full and clear ; and their Chronicles, composed in the vernacular, exhibit a richness and picturesque variety of incident, that give them inestimable value as a body of genuine historical documents. The reigns of Ferdinand and Isabella were particularly fruitful in these sources of information. History then, like most of the other departments of literature, seemed to be in a state of transition,—when the fashions of its more antiquated costume began to mingle insensibly with the peculiarities of the modern ; when, in short, the garrulous graces of narration were beginning to be tempered by the tone of grave and philosophical reflection.

We will briefly notice a few of the eminent sources from which Mr Irving has drawn his account of the 'Conquest of Granada.' The first of these is the Epistles of Peter Martyr, an Italian *savant*, who, having passed over with the Spanish ambassador into Spain, and being introduced into the court of Isabella, was employed by her in some important embassies. He was personally present at several campaigns of this war. In his 'Letters,' he occasionally smiles at the caprice which had led him to exchange the pen for the sword; while his speculations on the events passing before him, being those of a scholar, rather than of a soldier, afford in their moral complexion a pleasing contrast to the dreary details of blood and battle. Another authority is the Chronicle of Bernaldez, a worthy ecclesiastic of that period, whose bulky manuscript, like that of many a better writer, lies still ingulphed in the dust of some Spanish library, having never been admitted to the honors of the press. Copies of it, however, are freely enough circulated. It is one of those good-natured, gossiping memorials of an antique age, abounding equally in curious and commonplace incident, told in a way sufficiently prolix, but not without considerable interest. The testimony of this writer is of particular value, moreover, on this occasion, from the proximity of his residence, in Andalusia, to those scenes, which were the seat of the war. His style overflows with that religious loyalty, with which Mr Irving has liberally seasoned the effusions of Fray Antonio Agapida. Hernando del Pulgar, another contemporary historian, was the Secretary and Counsellor of their Catholic majesties, and appointed by them to the post of national Chronicler; an office familiar both to the courts of Castile and Aragon, in which latter country, especially, it has been occupied by some of its most distinguished historians. Pulgar's long residence at court, his practical acquaintance with affairs, and above all, the access which he obtained, by means of his official station, to the best sources of information, have enabled him to make his work a rich repository of facts relating to the general resources of government, the policy of its administration, and, more particularly, the conduct of the military operations in the closing war of Granada, of which he was himself an eye-witness. In addition to these writers, this period has been illumined by the labors of the most celebrated historians of Castile and Aragon, Mariana and Zurita; both of whom conclude their narratives with it; the last expanding the biography of Ferdinand alone into two

volumes folio. Besides these, Mr Irving has derived collateral lights from many sources of inferior celebrity, but not less unsuspicuous credit.\* So that, in conclusion, notwithstanding a certain dramatic coloring which Fray Agapida's ' Chronicle ' occasionally wears, and notwithstanding the romantic forms of a style, which, to borrow the language of Cicero, seems ' to flow, as it were, from the very lips of the Muses,' we may honestly recommend it as substantially an authentic record of one of the most interesting, and, as far as English scholars are concerned, one of the most untravelled portions of Spanish history.

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\* Neither of Mr Irving's late writings could have been compiled from materials existing in any or all of the public libraries in this country ; and this independently of the manuscript authorities used by him, which may be supposed not easily met with out of Spain. The same remark is predicable of most of the historical works, which daily appear in France, Germany, and England. One cause of our deficiency in such original documents, and, indeed, in all but the more obvious and classical productions of literature, has been the difficulty of meeting with an intelligent agent in Europe, competent to the selection and purchase of such works. Whatever impediment, however, has been occasioned by this circumstance is now removed. Mr. O. Rich, the late American Consul at Madrid, whose valuable library furnished Mr Irving with some of the most important materials for his ' Life of Columbus,' has transferred his residence to London ; where he devotes himself to the execution of such commissions for the purchase of books as he may be entrusted with by his countrymen. He has been employed in making extensive purchases for Harvard College Library and the Boston Athenæum, as well as several smaller ones for individuals of this city ; and he has uniformly executed his orders with promptness, sagacity, and great economy. His accurate bibliographical knowledge, and his extensive correspondence through all the principal cities of the continent, afford such facilities for literary acquisitions, as we hope will be improved by public institutions and private individuals. We feel that we are doing a service to the cause of letters in recommending this gentleman, whose useful labors have well entitled him to this public testimony. Mr Rich's address in London is 12 Red Lion Square.